

February 12
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A LINCOLN DAY
MESSAGE



NOWHERE is the greatness of America more finely revealed than in the life story of Abraham Lincoln; in that simple but heroic record of struggle and achievement the heart of America speaks. His career is an illustration of the possibilities which America offers to those who strive.

Born in Kentucky, then a pioneer State, February 12, 1809, Lincoln's early life was one of extreme poverty, hard labor, and limited opportunities. His education was such as he himself was able to acquire by study at night after long hours of toil and with little aid from schools. Yet so persistent was he in the pursuit of knowledge that when he reached manhood he was able to take a leading part in the affairs, first of his community, then of the State, and finally of the Nation.

Winning and holding the confidence of the public and constantly growing in public esteem, Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1861, and re-elected in 1865. His administration thus covered the period of the Civil War, and he is justly regarded as the Preserver of the Union of the States, because largely through his wisdom, courage, and integrity that struggle ended in the larger life of a firmly united people.

As Americans we are justly proud that in our land and under our institutions it was possible for one so humbly born thus to ad-

vance by his own efforts until he attained the highest office within the gift of the people.

It is particularly fitting that we should bring to mind at this time the teachings of Abraham Lincoln, and the example of his life, because today, as in his day, our country is passing through many and great changes, and we look to those simple principles of human conduct by virtue of which he became the teacher and the savior of his country. More now than ever before, his immortal Gettysburg Address comes to us as a living message:

“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remain-

ing before us: that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

The government and the history of the United States are the sources from which Lincoln drew his political ideas. When he was first elected President of the United States and was on his way to Washington to take office, he stopped at Philadelphia to deliver an address in Independence Hall, where, in 1776, the Declaration of Independence had been signed. In this address he said:

"All the political sentiments I entertain have been drawn, so far as I am able to draw them, from the sentiments which originated and were given to the world from this hall. I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence."

In his first inaugural address as President, Lincoln in the following words declared his firm faith in the great American principle, that the will of the majority must rule:

"A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does of necessity fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible. The rule of a

minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism in some form is all that is left."

Lincoln had no patience with the petty opposition of small factions after a decision had been reached by the free vote of a majority.

Still less did he believe in violent opposition to the will of the majority. Speaking to a society of young men in a Western city he said:

"There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law."

He had learned from the rude pioneering experiences of his youth the evils and dangers of lawlessness. When but twenty-eight years old he said, with the conviction of one who knew well whereof he spoke:

"Let reverence for the law be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap; let it be taught in the schools, in seminaries, in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling books, and almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And in short let it become the political religion of the nation. . . ."

One of the great principles of conduct which Lincoln required of himself and of others was that of strict honesty. While yet an unknown lawyer he earned for himself the title of "Honest Abe," which clung to him through life.

Another principle of conduct taught and practised by Lincoln was that work is a good and not an evil, and that by the exercise of their faculties in daily work men attain to the best of which they are capable.

With the opportunities afforded by our free institutions, and by the practice of integrity, toil, and self-culture, Lincoln believed that men could and should make continual progress. With this in mind, he said:

"Now there is no such relation between capital and labor as is assumed, nor is there any such thing as a free man being fixed for life in the condition of a hired laborer . . . the prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just and generous and prosperous system which opens the way to all, gives hope to all, and consequent energy and progress and improvement of condition to all."

Lincoln firmly believed in the righteousness of private property rightfully acquired, and in the security of such possession as an encouragement to thrift and enterprise. Thus in reply to a letter from the Workmen's Association of New York he said:

"Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable; is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

For us today the life and teachings of Abraham Lincoln are full of the highest in-

spiration. In carrying out the great work that we have before us, that the world may recover from the devastating conflict through which it has just passed, we cannot do better than constantly to remember these noble words from his second inaugural address that have become a classic wherever the English tongue is known:

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds,—to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

How strangely silent as to many of our deepest and most abiding sentiments would the political history of America appear to us today if it were deprived of the sayings of Lincoln. In him we feel that our country has spoken the inmost truth of its political ideas. And so he will always appear to us as the embodiment of those ideas. When we see his face depicted, we think reverently of the long struggle by which our freedom was maintained; when we read his words we are recalled to those principles on which our freedom is based; when we gather to do him honor, we rededicate ourselves to the preservation and perfection of that freedom based on law whose worth and stability it was the privilege and the glory of Abraham Lincoln to have made manifest to all the world.